ON AMIDISM

A Short Discourse by Grandmaster T'an Hsu
of Chan Shan Temple
to
Buddhist Catechumens

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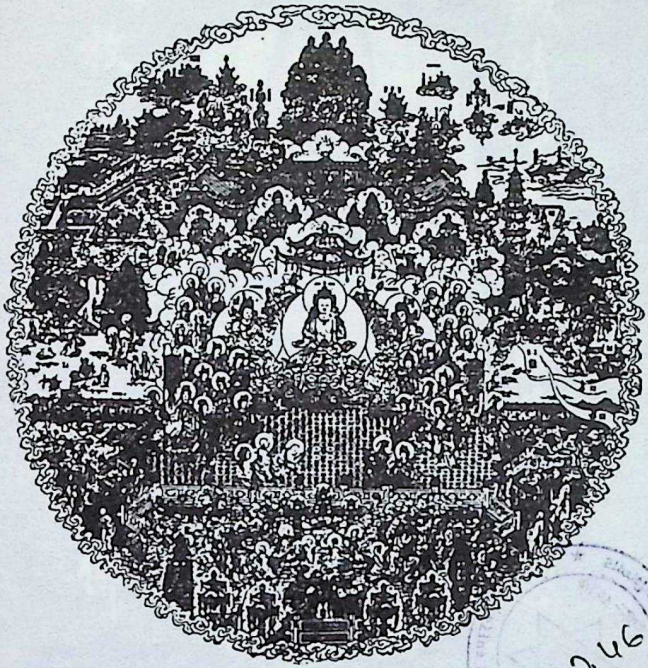

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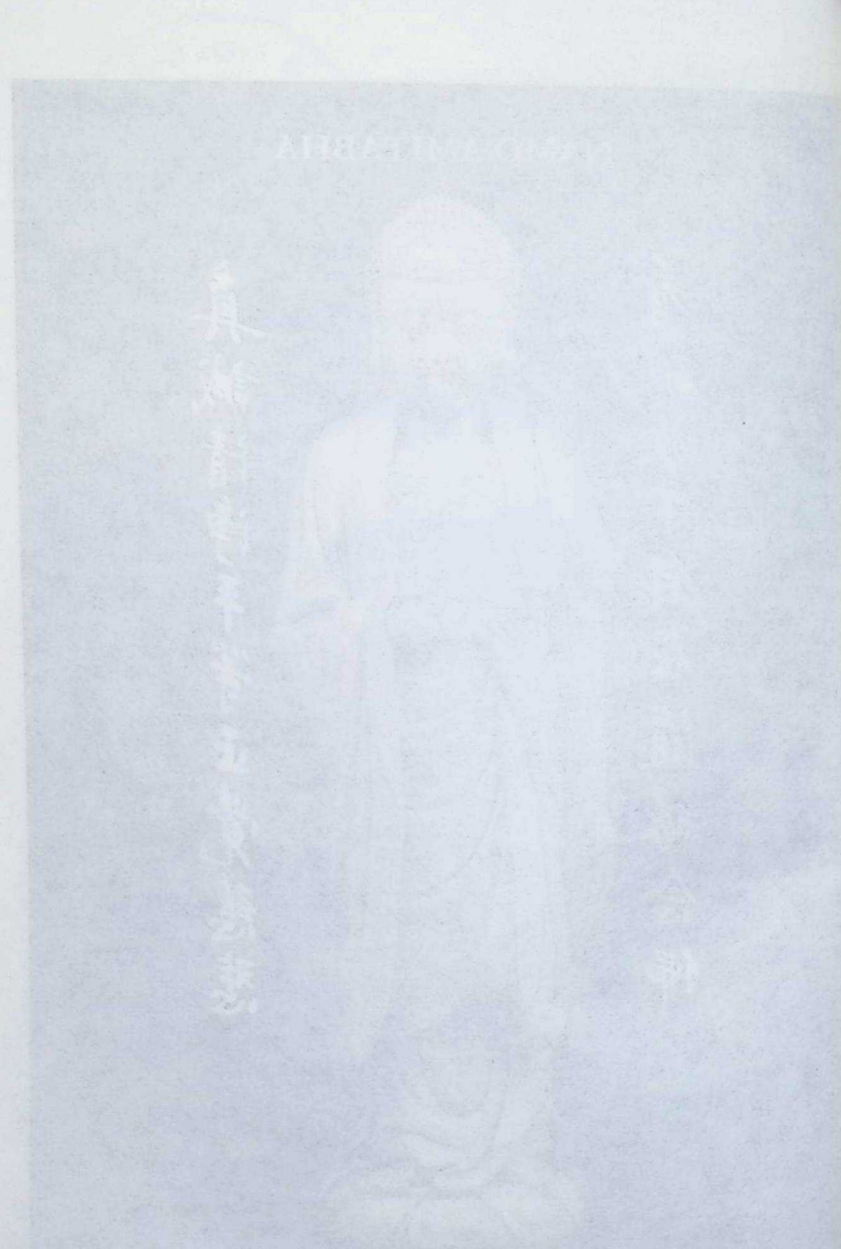

FOREWORD

It is hoped that this booklet introducing the Pure Land school of Buddhism, as practiced in China and now in America, will be helpful to students new to Buddhism and of interest to Buddhists already established in its practice.

We earnestly recommend the teaching of the Pure Land tradition for your exploration because:

In its own right, it is an excellent means of realizing enlightenment, of realizing that the Pure Land **is** Pure Mind.

Its practical method of reciting Buddha Amitabha's name may also be included in other forms of Buddhist training.

It is well suited to the present age as the invocation can easily be included in our daily life.

We also believe that Grandmaster T'an Hsu has given us a refreshing exposition of the Buddha's teachings in his interpretation of the Three Jewels of Buddha (the Enlightened One), Dharma (the Law), and Sangha (the Community), as well as a unique explanation of the Eightfold Path.

May you be well and happy.

May you persevere on your path to awakening.

The Buddhist Association
of the United States

3070 Albany Crescent
Bronx, New York 10463

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A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO AMITABHA BUDDHA

In the sacred Buddhist texts of China, the **Sutra of Buddha of Infinite Life** (無量壽佛經) relates Amitabha Buddha.

On a certain occasion, Sakyamuni Buddha (the Buddha of our present age) was on Vulture Peak, surrounded by his disciples. Ananda, the Buddha's personal attendant, noticed the radiant beauty of Buddha and inquired what was the cause of the Buddha's joy. Sakyamuni relates the following story:

In an infinite time in the past, Bhiksu Dharmakara observed the misery of all sentient beings, and moved by compassion, he vowed to establish a pure and perfect land where all could be liberated from their suffering. He then made forty-eight Vows in which he promised to establish this land or else he would not attain enlightenment.

The Sutra declares that Bhiksu Dharmakara practiced for many eons until he accomplished all his vows. Since he has achieved his aims, he is considered to be the Buddha of that land—THE BUDDHA OF INFINITE LIGHT AND LIFE.

The original title of this booklet in Chinese is "Nien Fo Lun (念佛論)." "Nien Fo" means either oral invocation of Buddha's name, or mental contemplation on Buddha (usually both). A complete translation of the title would be cumbersome, hence "Amidism."

ON AMIDISM

A Short Discourse

By
Grandmaster T'an Hsu

Originating in northern India and spreading to China and other countries in the world, Buddhism aims at nothing less than helping sentient beings enlighten their minds, thus eradicating suffering and conflict and attaining peace. "Buddha" means The Enlightened One — one who awakens both himself and others, having first fully realized perfect and complete enlightenment. Moreover, Buddhism considers loving-kindness and compassion to be essential qualities inherent in enlightenment; for loving-kindness imparts peace, compassion uproots misery.

After his advent into the world, Buddha Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha, preached for forty-nine years after his awakening. His sermons were later

collected into the Tripitaka,[1] in Twelve Divisions.[2]

Human beings differ in background and disposition and, therefore, the teachings which they receive are also diverse, but all Buddhadharma (the teachings of Buddha) is based on the Tripitaka. After Buddhism was introduced into China, five main schools arose: The Sect,[3] Teaching,[4] Vinaya, Esoterism and Amidism.

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1. Tripitaka means Three Baskets of the Law. Dharma refers to the three-part canon. This collection is divided into Sutras which contain the discourses of Buddha, Vinaya which contains the Rules of Discipline which govern the Sangha (Brotherhood of Monks and Nuns), and Sastras, the philosophical analysis of the Sutras.
2. Twelve Divisions are classified in the Mahayana Canon. They are:
   1. Sutra - Buddha's sermons
   2. Geya - metrical pieces
   3. Gatha - verses, chants
   4. Nidana - the Law of Causation
   5. Itivrttaka - narratives of disciples
   6. Jataka - stories of Buddha's previous lives
   7. Adbhuta - dharma-miracles
   8. Avadana - parables
   9. Upadesa - theories
   10. Udana - impromptu or unsolicited addresses of Buddha
   11. Vaipulya - expanded sutras
   12. Vyakarana - prophecies
3. Chinese Buddhism usually refers to the Dhyana sect as The Sect. "Dhyana" is transliterated from the Sanskrit into "Ch'an na" (禪那) in Chinese, and shortened to Ch'an, or Zen in Japanese pronunciation. Its meaning approximates mental cultivation, or meditation.
4. There are many Teaching schools, which have numerous subdivisions. These schools or branches are usually named after the geographical area of origination, such as T'ien T'ai (天臺), or after the doctrines, such as San Lun (三論), Fa Hsiang (法相), etc.

Buddha Sakyamuni did not establish these schools, nor can any mention of these schools be found in the Buddhist canon. These teachings evolved to accommodate varying characteristics and temperaments of all people. The disciples of the great masters of each school transmitted these teachings during the course of many generations.

Among the five main schools, The Sect represents "A special transmission outside the scriptures." Its emphasis is on Dhyana or meditation practice—the direct pointing to the mind of man: seeing into one's own nature, and the realization of Buddhahood.

The approach taken by the Teaching schools is that an intellectual understanding of the basic principles of Buddhism is necessary before an attempt is made towards self-cultivation through dhyana.

In the Vinaya school, emphasis is on the observation of the precepts laid down by Buddha. One begins by regulating the body and proceeds gradually to composing the mind. The minimum number of precepts is five, but one may also observe from ten to 250.[5] There are also precepts for Bodhisattvas,

5. The Five Precepts are (1) not to kill, (2) not to steal, (3) not to indulge in harmful sexual conduct, (4) not to lie, (5) not to take intoxicating liquors or harmful drugs. These are minimum moral requirements for any Buddhist. On certain occasions, the Ten Precepts are observed. In addition to the above training rules are the precepts (6) not to eat at unregulated hours, (7) not to use cosmetics or perfumes, (8) not to sleep on high or luxurious beds, (9) not to attend theatrical performances, (10) not to handle silver, gold, or money.

who are candidates for Buddhahood. By scrupulous observation of the precepts in spirit and letter, one may develop serenity and thereby gain spiritual wisdom.

The Esoteric school specializes in the practice of invocation of mantras, with emphasis on the three-fold mysteries.[6]

The practices of the four schools mentioned above are usually more difficult for the beginner.

In contrast, Amidism is the simplest and most direct way of practice. If one keeps repeating the invocation "Namo Amitabha Buddha" (Homage to the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life) until single-minded attention is reached, one may finally be led by Buddha to rebirth in the Western Paradise, where there is access to Buddha's knowledge and insight and so recover the essence of Enlightenment. This practice is suitable for the intelligent person as well as the dull person. The method to be practiced in the Amidist approach is to repeat the invocation of Buddha's name and to contemplate Buddha with reverence. Of course, one must also strive to uphold the moral precepts.

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6. A mantra is an invocation based on the scientific knowledge of the power of sound. The three-fold mysteries refer to the physical, oral, and mental faculties.

It may be asked: Why is it necessary to invoke Buddha's name and contemplate Buddha?

Let us understand first the meaning of "Nien Fo" in Chinese.

The character "Nien" (念) is composed of two distinct characters; namely, "chin," which means "now," and "hsin," which means "the mind." Separately, we have "now" and "the mind;" combined, we have "Nien."

"Fo" (佛) is short for "Fo T'o," a transliteration of the Sanskrit word "Buddha," which means The Enlightened One. It signifies understanding.

It would be well for everyone to try to practice Amidism because each and every person is capable of undertaking this training. Its purpose is to realize enlightenment and singleness of thought. One single thought may pervade all Ten Dharma Worlds.[7] It is said that all periods of time, both past and present, cannot be dissociated from the present instant, and

7. For a psychological explantion of the Ten Dharma Worlds, see page 23-24. The Ten Dharma Worlds include six inferior and four superior existences: namely (1) Narka - hells, (2) Preta - hungry ghosts, (3) Tiryagyoni - animals, (4) Asura - malevolent spirits, (5) Manusya - human beings, (6) Devas - celestial beings, (7) Sravaka - Buddha's personal disciples, (8) Pratyeka - solitary Buddhas, (9) Bodhisattvas - beings who delay final enlightenment in order to aid others, and (10) Buddhas - fully enlightened ones.

the worlds and universes, as numerous as molecules and atoms, are not separate from one another by even a hair's breadth. If one resolves to practice Amidism, practice for one instant produces enlightenment for one instant, while practice at all times produces enlightenment at all times. Likewise, practice for one instant produces understanding for one instant, while practice at all times produces understanding at all times.

Who does not wish to be enlightened? Who does not wish to gain understanding? Most people pay lip service to these ideals by saying they wish to be enlightened and they wish to gain understanding. However, they harbor foolish thoughts in the mind.

What are foolish thoughts? They are the three mental evils of greed, hatred, and delusion. What are foolish actions? They are the three bodily evils: killing, stealing, and harmful sexual conduct. The four oral evils are speaking hypocritically, and using harsh, false and suggestive language. As a result of mental, vocal, and bodily pollution, human beings constantly involve the six senses[8] in discrimination of sight, sound, etc. Thus most lives are spent precariously living on crude sense data.

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8. Besides the sense organs for seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, Buddhism considers the mind as the sixth sense.

The practice of Amidism aims at the exchange of the raw for the ripe product. One has to put aside what is known and what one understands in order to remove the personal element and to recover **fundamental knowing** and **fundamental understanding**. One who is able to recover **fundamental seeing** will become a Buddha. The realization of Buddhahood does not mean that anything extra is added. It is simply to make use of the practice of Amidism to such an extent that one's self-nature and Buddha nature are totally integrated in the process and all impure thoughts of the mind are totally eradicated. Buddha nature appears whenever the defilements of the mind are completely and permanently removed.

The mind of a human being is originally enlightened and bright, extending through all the Dharma realms. However, as ignorance has prevailed since time without beginning, this original mind has been clouded by the six sensory organs and their objects.[9]

Consequently, we are biased in our knowledge and understanding, recognizing only the physical body as the self while ignoring our inherent Buddha Nature, which pervades empty space and extends over all the Dharma realms.

It should be pointed out that the physical body,

9. The six sense objects are sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and the world of ideas.

which is considered to be the self, is temporarily composed of seven major elements in the form of solids, liquids, gases, heat, space, root (sensory organs), and consciousness. When these components are separated, the body will no longer exist as a unit. For example, skin, flesh, tendons, and bones are solids. Blood and saliva are liquids. Warmth is derived from heat. Energy and movement involve elements in gaseous form. Spaces inside and outside the body are void (This space is essential in breathing). Each sense organ involves one area of consciousness. If these components were to separate, the person would no longer exist. Where, then, can the ego be found?

Actually, the ego, which is most often identified with the body, is composed of seven elements and is nothing but a container made of skin, filled with impurities, rotten and foul-smelling. Now, if in the course of the present lecture someone should suddenly send in a skin container filled with excrement, even though tightly sealed, we would all consider it filthy, and would hold our noses to avoid the smell, shy away, or even throw it out, considering it abhorrent. In fact, however, each one of it is an odorous container covered by skin and equipped with openings at both ends which emit unpleasant odors. As the saying states, "Uncleanness drains out from the nine

orifices." Nevertheless, everyone considers this skin container to be the self, and so precious that it is adorned with cosmetics and nourished with food to enhance its beauty. In Buddha's view, such ideas are the most dangerous of confused illusions.[10] We must all be aware that this body of ours, which everyone considers to be the self is really not the self but an object or instrument intended to serve, rather than rule our lives. **It is not the ego.** It is not "I" or "we." It is rather "mine" or "ours," because this body is only a part of that which belongs to us. Like an object that serves a certain purpose, we may use it whenever we want to, and put it aside whenever we do not want to use it. We should not be burdened by it. If we cannot put it aside, we are encumbered by that object.

According to the ordinary view, we consider the physical body as the self, and in addition to the self, we are aware of the physical bodies of others. Taking the self and others together, we have all sentient beings. Each and every sentient being

10. It should be understood that Buddha viewed the human body in a detached and scientific manner. This view does not mean that we should ignore the needs of the body, but rather attend to it as a physician would care for a wound. Thus caring for the body, it may be used as a vehicle to assist us in the realization of enlightenment — Editor's Note.

desires to live long, and this continuity constitutes the idea of longevity. However, all these ideas are unreal noumena and illusory phenomena. For example, the concept of one's self and others is relative. According to this relationship, there is an awareness of self because I am aware of others; and conversely, there is self-awareness in others because I am aware of myself. The concept of sentient beings as a group is an illusion of causation, because they exist as a result of past karma, or the law of cause and effect. Longevity is an illusion based on the idea of continuity. If we dispense with these illusions, where can the real "ego" be found?

Moreover, "self" implies mastery or ownership. However, this physical "self" of ours is not its own master. For instance, when hungry, one cannot do without eating. When thirsty, one cannot do without drinking. At the end of one's life span, there is nothing to do but die. Facing something beautiful, one cannot resist casting a few more glances. Under conditions where there is indulgence of the five desires,[11] one cannot resist experiencing enjoyment. Thus, a person is deprived of all mastery of the "self."

We should be aware that such things as eating,

11. The five desires are those for wealth, sex, food, fame, and sleep.

drinking, and enjoyment all pertain to material life. There is a beginning and an end to material existence. In addition to material life, each human being has a spiritual life which has neither beginning nor end. What is the essence of the spiritual life with neither beginning nor end? It is the essence of enlightenment inherent in each of us. Though invisible and intangible, this essence of enlightenment pervades empty space and fills all the Dharma realms. It is found everywhere. There is a saying which tells us that Voidness is generated in the Great Enlightenment, as bubbles burst out over the sea.

To practice Amidism, one is to cultivate the spiritual life; and relying on Buddha's power and his own strength, he aims to be reborn in the Western Paradise.

Buddhist masters in the past, such as Grand Master Chih Cheh of T'ien T'ai, Ch'an Master Shou of Yung Ming, Grand Master Ou Yi, Ch'an Master Ch'eh Wu, and many others finally came to follow the Pure Land School, and concentrated on the practice of Amidism. They did this because they knew that a disciple who trains under other schools might probably lack aptitude in respect to background consequently go astray in his practice. However, those who practise Amidism, as long as there is strong, sufficient faith and determination, may rely

on Buddha's power and their own effort,[12] and they will never flounder aimlessly. Therefore, it may be said that Amidism is the most convenient and the most straightforward approach in treading the path to Enlightenment.

To practice other schools, one invariably relies on his own efforts. He has to eradicate all illusions and doubts in order to realize the truth. This is easier said than done. Actually, it is rather difficult to achieve such cultivation unless much hard work has been performed and there is considerable advancement.

One of the unique advantages of Amidism is that one may carry with him some of his evil karma when reborn in the Western Paradise, where he may rely on the power of Amitabha Buddha and Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahathamaprapta, and together with other cultivated beings practice spiritual purification. Gradually, evil karma will disappear and attachments will vanish. He may move from one of the Four Realms[13] to the others;

12. Faith, determination (wish or resolve) and practice (good works) are equally important factors in Amidism.
13. According to the doctrines propounded by the T'ien T'ai (天臺) School, there were Four Realms in the Buddha Lands: (1) Mixed Habitation, where ordinary men and devas dwell with the Saints and Buddhas, etc., (2) Expedient Realm, the inhabitants of which have partially destroyed illusion, (3) Permanent Reward Realm, where Bodhisattvas dwell, and (4) the Realm of Eternal Rest and Light, where Buddhas dwell.

that is, from the realm of Mixed Habitation, the Expedient Realm, and then proceed to the Realm of Permanent Reward, and finally arrive at the Realm of Eternal Rest and Light, where he may see Buddha's reality. Progress is possible even for one with poor background and inadequate preparation. As for the person with superior background and preparation, no matter into which of the Buddha Lands he may be reborn, he will be able to perceive all Four Realms.

Another advantage of the Amidist approach is that as soon as one is reborn in the Western Paradise, there will be no retrogression to a lower spiritual level. He will never create any evil karma, and the work of self-cultivation will proceed until he finally becomes a Buddha who will, in turn, enlighten all sentient beings.

The approaches taken by other schools may be good too. They are not to be denigrated by anyone. Nevertheless, before one reaches the final destination aimed at by such approaches, there is always the possibility that he may fail or go amiss.

An illustration is found in the story of three Bodhisattvas: Asanga, Vasubandhu, and Samabodhi.

At first, these three friends were of one accord and had the same goal—to study and practice Idealistic Contemplation[14] and to be reborn into the

14. The contemplation work of the Idealist School holds that all is mind in its ultimate nature.

Inner Court of Tushita Heaven and to see Bodhisattva Maitreya, the future Buddha. They agreed among themselves that if one of them reached that heaven, he would come back to inform the other two. Later, Samabodhi passed away. Three years elapsed, and he did not return. After three more years, Vasubandhu was about to pass away, and Asanga was on his death bed.

"After you see Maitreya in heaven, by all means, come back and let me know," Asanga pleaded with him.

Vasubhandu, however, did return three years after his death.

Asanga asked him, "Why did it take so long for you to come back?"

Vasubandhu replied, "I arrived at the Inner Court of Tushita Heaven, sat there to listen to a sermon preached by Maitreya, then made three genuflections, took one lap of circumambulation and rushed back. Because the days and nights are much longer there than here, only a short time elapsed there while three years passed here in this world."

"Where is Samhabodhi? Why did he not return to notify us as agreed?" Asanga asked.

Vasubandhu replied, "He ascended to heaven. As he passed by the Outer Court of Tushita, he was caught and bound by the five desires before entering

the Inner Court. He had not yet seen Maitreya until then."

Having heard this, Asanga realized the great danger of rebirth in heaven. He made a new vow that he wished to be reborn, not in heaven, but in the Western Paradise (See examples cited in the "Treatise on Ten Apprehensions against Pure Land" by Grand Master Chih Cheh).

Just imagine what danger there is when even Samabodhi, though already ranked among the greatest Bodhisattvas, was entwined and bound by the five desires in heaven!

Similarly, if one who practices meditation and serenity fails to transcend the Three Realms,[15] he will finally descend to the appropriate state in accordance with karma after he has exhausted the enjoyment of heavenly bliss which is deserved no matter which one of the heavens is reached. Another example is to be found regarding the Bhiksu Wu Wen, who refused instruction as cited in the **Surangama Sutra**.

For Amidists, there are no such pitfalls. We have two lines in a verse expressing this idea:

"Granted, that you may succeed through self-cultivation in reaching the Non-Unconceivable

15. The Three Realms are the Realm with Desires, Realm with Forms, and Realm without Forms.

Heaven."[16]

"It is not as good as returning to the Western Paradise."

This is to say that even after rebirth in the Non-Unconceivable Heaven, which is one of four Void Heavens, one will have to descend again when merits are exhausted. In contrast, it is much better to be reborn in the Western Paradise, even if reborn in the lowest level, for it is possible to gradually rise to the highest stage. Thus it is far better than rebirth in the Non-Unconceivable Heaven.

During the specified period for Amidist practice, the day begins with recitation of the **Amitabha Sutra**. For evening exercise, possibly in a Buddhist temple, the **Amitabha Sutra** is also read every day. Recitation of this sutra will enable one to mentally envisage the state of grandeur and beauty accorded to Amitabha and the Western Paradise. Actually, what is perceived through the six sensory organs is nothing but the beauty and splendor of the Western Paradise. Though not having yet been born in the Western Paradise, he has been mentally engulfed by its scenery. His consciousness is automatically bathed in the atmosphere of its wonder and glory. When the hour of

16. The Non-Unconceivable Heaven is the realm above the Unconceivable Heaven.

his death comes at last, the karma of self-cultivation will come to the fore, and all the saints whom he contemplates in his daily invocation of the sacred name of Buddha Amitabha will manifest themselves at this point to lead and receive him in the Western Paradise. And the pure and wonderful sight of the Western Paradise, which dwells in his mind, in this instant, will materialize and appear before his eyes.

As the saying goes, Amitabha resides in one's own nature, and the Pure Land exists solely in the mind. All sentient beings are potential Buddhas, and Buddhas are also sentient beings, for both are permeated with the essence of Buddha Nature. The mind is the Pure Land and vice versa, because both are idealistic manifestations.

It all depends on how much effort is put into the practice of Amidism. If faith is unshakably strong and firm one's own nature becomes Buddha Nature, and vice versa. As Buddha is endowed with limitless light, so are all sentient beings. As Buddha possesses limitless light, so do all sentient beings. Buddha Amitabha has splendor and dignity as a result his merits. Likewise, sentient beings also have resultant splendor and dignity from merits.

To quote the **Amitabha Sutra**, "They[17] are all

17. "They" refers to the birds in the Pure Land who sing to preach the Dharma.

formed by transformation because Buddha desires to have the words of Dharma propagated." This shows that all the scenes and conditions of the Western Paradise are idealistic manifestations effectuated in accordance with karmic phenomena. If Buddha Amitabha is able to effectuate such manifestations, there is no reason why sentient beings cannot do the same, since the nature of sentient beings is identical with Buddha Nature.

Therefore, we say that in our own nature there is Amitabha and that in Idealism there is the Pure Land. As far as nature is concerned, no boundary line can be drawn to separate sentient beings from Buddhas. When speaking of the Pure Land, it is impossible to point out which is idealistic and which is nonidealistic. It is an integral unit, whether it is the Amitabha of the Western Paradise or the Amitabha of one's own Nature, whether it is the Pure Land in the West or the Pure Land in the idealized mind.

However, it should be understood that the idealized mind mentioned above does not refer to the deluded mind within a human being under the deceptive influence of the six types of sensory objects.[18] It refers to the mind from which all dharmas (things) generate. The self-nature mentioned

18. See footnote 8, page 6.

above does not refer to the habitual nature temporarily congregated by the four main components[19] of the human body. It refers to the self-nature which all sentient beings intrinsically possess. Amidists who recite the **Amitabha Sutra** every day should have a good understanding of these points and thereby have their own faith strengthened.

The **Amitabha Sutra** is a sermon preached by Buddha Sakyamuni, of his own accord, without being asked. He tells us in this sermon of the grandeur of the Western Paradise and of the rebirth in this Paradise through the practice of Amidism. As far as the significance of the sutra is concerned, it equals the **Saddharma-pundarika Sutra** (the **Lotus Sutra**), for the latter was also preached by Buddha without his being asked, to the Honored Arya Sariputra.

Having preached the **Sutra of Immeasurable Meanings**, Buddha entered samadhi,[20] with both body and mind completely still, and emitted brilliant rays from the urna[21] to illuminate all eighteen-thousand lands of the Eastern Worlds, while displaying all kinds of auspicious signs. The audience assembled

19. See page 7, fourth paragraph.
20. Samadhi, a state of concectration.
21. The urna is the white curled hair between Buddha's eyebrows—one of the 32 attributes of the Buddha.

there were thus curious and raised all sorts of doubts and questions. After Bodhisattvas Maitreya and Manjusri had answered the problems and dispelled the doubts of the congregation, Buddha returned serenely from the samadhi, and without being asked, began to speak to Arya Sariputra.

"The wisdom of the Buddhas is unfathomably deep and unlimitably broad. The portal of their wisdom is difficult to find and difficult to enter. It is unknown to all the Sravakas[22] and Pratyekabuddhas···the very profound Dharma which had not been found before is now attained···To sum up, the immeasurable and boundless Dharma, which had not been found before, is all accomplished by the Buddhas."

The **Saddharmapundarika Sutra** is the **Amitabha Sutra** preached in detail, and the **Amitabha Sutra** is the **Saddharmapundarika Sutra** in summary. Both sutras relate entirely rational facts. In contrast to other sutras which expound many terms in connection with Dharmalakshana[23] and pursuade people to understand the principles and to work on self-cultivation, these two sutras deal only with perception of phenomenal reality by the direct reasoning mind.

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22. See footnote 7, page 5.
23. Dharmalakshana is the nature and characteristics of all things.

This will become evident to all of us after a juxtapositional comparison and study of the **Saddharmapundarika Sutra** and the **Amitabha Sutra.**

The **Saddharmapundarika Sutra** is comprised of twenty-eight chapters in seven volumes. The first fourteen chapters introduce the temporary expediencies to demonstrate phenomenal realities, and the final fourteen chapters display supramundane realities. All chapters deal, however, with the supreme dharma.

In the **Amitabha Sutra**, Buddha said, "If there is a good man or a good woman who hears someone speak of Buddha Amitabha and hold firmly his name and title for one day, or two days, or three days, or four days, or five days, or six days, or seven days, whole-heartedly and without distraction, when this person approaches the hour of death, Buddha Amitabha and his holy company will manifest in front of him. This person, at the end, since he is not confused, will be able to proceed and be reborn in the most blissful country of Buddha Amitabha."

To quote from the 23rd chapter, "Anecdotes of Bodhisattva Bhaisajyaraja," of the **Saddharmapundarika Sutra**, "Anyone who hears this Sutra and practices accordingly, when this present life ends, will go to the Western Paradise, with Buddha Amitabha and the great Bodhisattvas surrounding the dwelling place, to be reborn on the precious seat

in a lotus blossom."

The similarity of these two passages is apparent.

Other descriptions in the **Amitabha Sutra** of the grandeur and splendor of the Land, of Buddha's life, of Buddha's radiance and of the protection and care by the Buddhas in six directions,[24] though different in comprehensiveness and language, are, in fact, identical in their content and significance. Therefore, one invocation of Buddha Amitabha's name represents the supreme dharma and covers unlimited approaches.

One invocation to Buddha Amitabha, if uttered properly, will immediately cause the six sense organs to become clean and clear. For instance, now while in the period of Amidist practice, the organ of sight will be clean and pure as we always look at and see the Buddha. The organ of hearing will be clean and pure as we inhale the aroma of incense. The tongue will be clean and pure as we recite Buddha's name incessantly. The body will be clean and pure as we face and worship Buddha all day long in a clean and pure place. The mind will be clean and pure as we contemplate and think of Buddha.

When the six sense organs are clean and pure, the three karmas are so cleansed; the physical evils

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24. Some of the names of the Buddhas in the six directions are given in the Sutra.

of killing, stealing, and lust will no longer exist, nor the oral evils of hypocritical, harsh, lying or suggestive speech. There will be no involvement in the mental evils of avarice, hatred, and delusion. The Ten Good Karmas[25] will immediately be practiced. A follower of Buddha finds it most difficult to curb the evil karmas committed by the body, tongue and mind. However, with one invocation of Buddha Amitabha's name, these three evils will be checked. Eventually, perception and contemplation will be fully developed and preparation for entering the Pure Land will grow. One will surely be reborn in the Western Paradise when this present life comes to an end.

Ordinary people usually consider it difficult to become a Buddha. In fact, it is not so difficult. Both Buddhas and ordinary sentient beings are invariably molded out of perception and contemplation. In one thought, Buddhas pervade the ten Dharma Worlds.[26] Likewise, a sentient being also pervades ten Dharma Worlds in one thought. If avarice arises at one thought, he is, indeed, a hungry ghost. If hatred arises at one thought, he is a hell-dweller.

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25. The Ten Good Karmas are the antitheses of the ten evils comprising the three physical, four oral and three mental evils mentioned above.

26. See footnote 7, page 5.

If delusion arises at one thought, he is a beast. If doubt and arrogance arise at one thought, he is an asura, a malevolent spirit. If one's thoughts fall on the five virtues regarding human relationships, as well as the Five Precepts, he will enter the world of humans. If his thoughts fall on the ten Good Karmas, he will be reborn in heaven. If his ideas are centered on the Four Noble Truths,[27] he equals the Buddha's immediate disciples. If his mind dwells on the doctrine of Twelve Links of Causation,[28] he is a Pratyekabuddha. If his ideas center on the Six Paramitas,[29] he is a Bodhisattva. If his thoughts dwell on altruism and equality, he is indeed a Buddha.

On the other hand, each person in the world has his own ideas—scholars, farmers, workmen, businessmen, soldiers, public officials, etc.—all have

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27. The Four Noble Truths are (1) the universality of pain and conflict, (2) the cause of pain which is craving, (3) the realization that there is an end to pain, and (4) the way or path leading to cessation of pain.

28. There are twelve links in the chain of existence: (1) ignorance, (2) karmic action, (3) consciousness, (4) name and form, (5) six sense organs, (6) contact, (7) sensation, (8) craving, (9) grasping, (10) becoming, (11) birth, (12) old age and death.

29. The Six Paramitas (Perfections) are (1) giving, (2) keeping the precepts, (3) patience in all circumstances, (4) zeal, (5) meditation, and (6) wisdom.

come to their present condition because of previous ideas. One becomes the embodiment of any fixed idea that is held in the mind.

This equally applies to the Amidist. Every day he looks at the Buddha, orally repeats the Buddha's name, physically bows and worships Buddha, mentally contemplates Buddha, and also hears Buddha's name proclaimed. At all times, his thoughts are on rebirth in the Western Paradise. In this way, he will surely be reborn in the Western Paradise, and will surely be able to realize Buddhahood.

Buddhism took its natural course in China and developed into many schools, such as T'ien T'ai school, Hsien Shou school, Fa Hsiang (also known as T'zu En or Wei Shih) school, Amidist school, Tantric school, Dhyana school, Vinaya school, etc. These schools were founded later for the transmission of the teaching and for the specialization of learning. Most of these schools are distinct from each other. However, the practices and tenets of the Amidist and Vinaya schools blended and were shared by other schools. They are also practiced by the seven categories[30] of Buddha's followers.

For instance, T'ien T'ai, Hsien Shou, San Lun,

30. The seven categories of Buddha's followers are listed on page 29. Sometimes reference is made to only four categories: bhikshus, bhikshunis, laymen and laywomen.

and Fa Hsiang differ in their teaching and vary in methods of meditation. Generally speaking, however, they all consider it most convenient to practice Amidism, and their followers may realize Buddhahood through this practice. Even in the Dhyana school, there is the meditation theme: "Who is invoking Buddha's name?" In short, no matter whether one renounces the world and enters the religious life or remains at home, no matter what his original motives are in following Buddha, one's sole aim is nothing but the realization of Buddhahood through the practice of Amidism. For example, in the great Chinese monasteries, both in the south and north, no matter to what schools devotees belong, when participating in the circumambulation in the grand hall twice every day, the invocation, "Namo Amitabha" is always repeated. All oral communications always begin and are responded to with the invocation, "Namo Amitabha." Of course, all have the same final goal: to be reborn in the Western Paradise, to see Buddha, and finally to realize Buddhahood. So you see what a convenient and popular approach Amidism is as a way of practice.

At the same time, in the process of following Buddha to realize enlightenment, one has to follow and keep the precepts. Whether or not Buddhism flourishes depends on its followers adhering to the

precepts. If Buddha's precepts are followed and kept by all, Buddhism will remain a vital force in the world. Otherwise, Buddhism will become extinct with the march of time.

When Buddha Sakyamuni was living he was the example for all his followers, and his disciples considered him the Master. After his death, all took the precepts as the Master.

When Buddha was near death, his followers, pleading with him to stay in the world, surrounded him, lamenting bitterly. Though in extreme grief, a thought suddenly occurred to Elder Wu P'in. He thought that previously Buddha's followers had him as a guide, but now that he was about to enter Parinirvana, there were still several questions to be clarified. At this point, Ananda was standing by Buddha, weeping grievously, with his face covered. Ananda was Buddha's personal attendant, and therefore most likely to transmit the Dharma as he was present whenever Buddha preached. Therefore, Elder Wu P'in requested Ananda to ask Buddha several questions: As all his followers dwelt with Buddha while he was still living, with whom would they abide after his passing? Since all looked upon Buddha as the Master when he was living, who or what were they to take as their master after Buddha's Parinirvana?

In reply to Ananda's inquiry, Buddha said:

"After my Nirvana, you should abide with the four Smrtyrupasthana" (i.e., objects on which the mind should dwell),[31] and should take the precepts as the Master."

So you see how important the precepts are to future generations!

All disciples of Buddha must follow and keep Buddha's precepts. Even if one may find it impossible to keep all the precepts, he must still follow and keep some of the more important training rules. If he can only keep a few precepts, it will be better than keeping none at all.

Each of the monasteries in north and south China has its own regulations and traditional practices. These regulations and practices are the precepts kept by all. Which temple or monastery or other establishment can function entirely without any regulations? Even for ordinary people, there are certain limits and controls in everyday relations. Therefore, it is equally important to keep the precepts and to practice Amidism.

The great Vinaya Master Hung I, though specializing in Vinaya, personally practiced Amidism wholeheartedly and devotedly. He advised people to

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31. Minute contemplation and analysis of the Body, Feelings, Mind, and Mind-Objects.

practice Amidism whenever they had an opportunity. Many other grand masters, such as Ti Hsien, Hsu Yun, etc., placed special emphasis on Amidism. Hence, it is said:

"For teachings, develop your own school. And for self-cultivation, practice Amidism."

Generaly speaking, followers of Buddha may be classfied into seven categories, namely:

1. Bhiksus, i.e., monks—men who have left home and taken the full vows to keep all the precepts;

2. Bhiksunis, i.e., nuns—women who have left home and taken the vows to keep all the precepts;

3. Siksamana—young women who learn the Dharma (Sramanerika, or female novices) and who intend to keep all the precepts. They are between 18 and 20 years of age. After a period of training, they may keep all the precepts and be Bhiksunis;

4. Sramenera—male novices who have left home and taken the Ten Precepts;

5. Sramenerika—female novices who have left home and who keep the Ten Precepts;

6. Upasaka—laymen who remain home to serve the Three Jewels;

7. Upasika—laywomen who remain home to serve the Three Jewels.

A lay Amidist should first take refuge in the Three Jewels and keep the Five Precepts.

What are the Three Jewels? They are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

There are Buddhas, such as Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha and founder of Buddhism in this Saha world,[32] and the other Buddhas of the past, present, and future.

Dharma means the laws and principles comprising the teachings preached by the Buddhas of the past, present, and future.

Sangha denotes the transmitters of the teaching, and is represented by the community who perpetuate Buddhadharma and who serve as examples to the followers of Buddhism.

These Three Jewels may also be found in our nature—the Three Jewels with specific manifestations, and the Three Jewels that remain in this world.

The Three Jewels within our own nature are intrinsically possessed by each sentient being, and are not to be sought externally; that is, one's own spiritual illumination and enlightenment constitute the Precious Buddha; the absolute, permanent, complete, and pure truths constitute the Precious Dharma; and one's own nature and harmony are the Precious Sangha.

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32. Saha world refers to this universe, of which this earth is a part.

What are the Three Jewels with specific manifestations? These Three Jewels are different on account of personality, physical elements, causes, effects, characteristics, phenomena, entities, and functions. For instance, profoundly enlightened ones and the manifestation of Buddha in Three Kayas[33] are all known as the Precious Buddha. The truth of Bhutatathata (which means real Suchness or the ultimate and unconditioned nature of all things) and all the expedient approaches are all known as the Precious Dharma. All the saints and sages are known as the Precious Sangha.

What are the Three Jewels that remain in this world? They are the three which stay on earth to enable Buddadharma to be handed down, without immanent extinction for the benefit of sentient beings. For example, statues and relics, which we see, represent the Precious Buddha; the Tripitaka of Sutras, Vinaya and Sastras, which we see, contain the Precious Dharma; and the community of people who leave home to perpetuate Buddha's work for the benefit of sentient beings, constitute the Precious Sangha.

One has to take refuge in the Three Jewels

33. The Three Kayas is the doctrine of the basic unity of reality underlying manifestation, the phenomenal and noumenal.

of his own nature which he intrinsically possesses rather than taking refuge in the other kinds of Three Jewels.

"Buddha" means the Enlightened One. Everyone has the potential for being enlightened. Therefore, to take refuge in Buddha means to take refuge in one's own natural, basically enlightened mind.

Everyone is able to release this wonderful essence of truth. Therefore, to take refuge in Dharma means to take refuge in the wonderful truth of Butatathata (Ultimate Reality), which one intrinsically possesses.

Everyone is able to sustain the wonderful truth which is developed from one's own true nature. Therefore, to take refuge in Sangha means to take refuge in one's own nature and harmony, which sustain the Dharma of enlightenment.

This is entirely different from the doctrines of other religions which stipulate that **only** dieties are dieties, humans being excluded from their company and considered inferior to these gods forever. Such a situation, to say the least, is far from being equitable in Buddhism's view. In contrast, Buddhism emphasizes equality of Dharma, without distinction of superior or inferior. Everyone has the nature of enlightenment. Everyone may practice Amidism and realize Buddhahood. Although in participating in

the ceremony of the Three Refuges, one takes refuge in the Three Jewels now existing in the world; he does this only to give guidance. However, one must also take refuge in the Three Jewels within one's own nature. As to the final realization of Buddhahood, by no means does it mean that one is to become a slave to any particular Buddha. An Amidist should be clear on this point—Buddhahood, by no means, can be achieved by proxy, nor is it ever conferred by others. It is the Buddhahood within one's own nature that has to **become** through the practice of Amidism.

In addition to taking the Three Refuges, one should try to keep the Five Precepts concomitantly with the practice of Amidism. It is compassionate not to kill. It is correct not to steal. It is appropriate not to hurt others sexually. It is faithful not to tell lies. It is sensible not to fog the mind with intoxicants. By keeping the Five Precepts, one works to practice the five secular virtues. In this world, what we need is loving-kindness, not cruelty; morality and virtue, not violence; courtesy and faithfulness, not deceit. We need reasonableness, not foolishness. Amidists who keep the Five Precepts develop virtues of kindness, morality, courtesy, sincerity, and reasonableness, not only as desirable elements for living in society,

but also as provisions for the journey to the Pure Land.

In addition to the Three Refuges and Five Precepts, there are Fourfold Smrtyupasthana (that is, Four Subjects of Reflection, which are explained below) and the eightfold Aryamarga, the Eight Correct Paths among the thirty-seven Bodhipasika Dharmas (that is, thirty-seven conditions leading to Enlightenment), which should always be kept in mind.

What are the four subjects of reflection?

The first area for reflection is that this body of ours is impure. For instance, one comes from somewhere unclean and passes to something unclean. He is altogether unclean, both inside and outside.

The second reflection is that all sensations are liable to pain. Generally speaking, there are eight kinds of suffering: birth, illness, aging, death, separating of loved ones, unavailability of sought-for objects, encounters with hated persons or things, and the scorching dominance of the five skandhas.[34] To enumerate each of the sufferings one by one

34. The five skandhas are the temporary conglomerates that comprise a human being. They are: (1) Name and form (usually defined as physical elements), (2) Feelings or sensations, (3) Perceptions or awareness, (4) Emotional reactions, (5) Consciousness, the relation between subject and object.

would be a limitless task. For example, no one may claim that he has no annoyances at all, either at home or in his community. As the Chinese saying states, "Eight or nine things out of ten go against our wishes." Events which go contrary to our wishes fail to gratify our minds and constitute various kinds of suffering.

The third reflection is that the mind is impermanent, since thought is born and dies in the mind, from moment to moment, without leaving a permanent trace.

The fourth is the reflection that all things are without ego, without reference to a nature of its own, since all things (dharmas) are only assumed names, are only vague images of the real, and nowhere is the real self-nature to be found.

In short, the above ideas are the Four Reflections which our minds should dwell upon to enable us to strengthen our faith in Amidism.

What are the Aryamarga—the Right or Correct Paths?

They are:

1. Samyag-drsti — Correct Views
2. Samyak-samkalpa — Correct Thoughts
3. Samyag-vac — Correct Words
4. Samyak-karmanta — Correct Deeds
5. Samyag-vayama — Correct Endeavors

6. Samyak-smrti — Correct Mindfulness
7. Samyak-samadhi — Correct Concentration
8. Samyag-ajiva — Correct Livelihood

Samyag-drsti — Correct Views preclude wrong information. One should not see what should not be seen; that is, one's eyes should not be polluted by wrong information.

Samyak-samkalpa — Correct Thoughts prevent one from thinking what should not be thought; that is, one's heart should not be corrupt.

Samyag-vac — Correct Words require one to refrain from saying what should not be said; that is, one should not befoul the mouth with untrue words.

Samyak-karmanta — Correct Deeds mean that one should engage in correct occupation. For example, people in the community who conduct or participate in philanthropic or medical work and care for the sick assume an admirable profession. There are other occupations, however, such as meat packing and the slaughtering of livestock. People who choose these also choose a particular occupation—but there is a difference! As it is said, "An arrow-maker worries about failure to wound, while an armor-maker worries about failure to protect." Therefore, from among the many occupations one should choose a correct one which develops virtues and accumulates

merits, rather than an improper one which would secure the opposite effects.

Samyag-vayama — Correct Endeavors are closely related to correct deeds. For instance, persons involved in the various occupations mentioned above all work with equal diligence, but some are working and proceeding on the path leading to deliverance and Buddhahood, while others travel on the road leading to an evil destination. Again, an Amidist may stay up late and get up early, and with vigorous endeavor work hard on the road leading to Buddhahood. Therefore, there is a vast difference between correct endeavors and incorrect activities.

Samyak-smrti — Correct Mindfulness (attentiveness) involves awareness of ideas in the mind which are about to emerge, but have not yet appeared. One should start any thought from a kind and good heart. The mind should not be contaminated by impure thoughts.

Samyak-samadhi — Correct Awareness means that anything which is correct and proper should be done wholeheartedly, with undivided attention. What is proper and correct? For instance, the practice of Amidism is proper and good. We should practice Amidism devoutly until we are entirely free from distraction and attain the state of Amidist samadhi, which is a form of correct awareness.

Samyag-ajiva — Correct Livelihood means that we should check our physical, vocal, and mental actions against all the correct factors mentioned above and, from the beginning, follow the proper laws and live with body, speech, and mind kept pure and clean. By no means should we do anything that causes us to lead a wicked life.

The explanation of the Eight Correct Paths is given above solely for the convenience of beginners who have only just started to study Buddhism. It will not be so simple if further, deeper study is conducted in accordance with doctrinal teachings.

In addition to wholeheartedly practicing Amidism with undivided attention, an Amidist may take, from time to time, the truths of the Four Reflections and the Eight Correct Paths to check his physical and mental behavior in order to prevent physical laxity and weakening of faith, determination, and practice.

As to methods of practicing Amidism, an Amidist should select one technique that fits in with his own background and temperament. Generally, there are several methods of practice. One technique is the Respiration Method, which may be most convenient. This may be practiced by saying the first four syllables of the invocation "Namo Amitabha;" that is, "Namo Ami——"while inhaling, and finishing

with "——tabha" while exhaling. Thus as long as he is able to breathe, he will utter the name of Amitabha. Eventually, he will invoke the name of Amitabha at all times—walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. This requires some effort, indeed. When he is at the end of his life and is about to give up his last breath, his life-long karmic flow will follow his final ejaculation of Buddha's name, and enable him to be reborn in the Western Paradise and to see Buddha Amitabha.

Accounts of rebirth into the Paradise of Amidists, in the religious order and among laymen and women, old and young, for whom there are extraordinary signs at the hour of death are given in the book entitled, "Records of Rebirth into the Pure Land: Biographies of Amidists." I have witnessed, with my own eyes, more than twenty cases, not to mention those which I have heard of. Now I shall cite only three out of many which I have seen so that faith may be inspired in all of us.

The first concerns Dharma Master Hsiu Wu, a native of Yingkow, a bricklayer before he joined the religious order. Hard life and toilsome labor reminded him that there was only suffering and no lasting joy in this world of ours. He tried to discover the way to eliminate suffering. Later, he heard of the advantages of Amidism and resolved to

pursue this practice. After he left home, he received formal Buddhist training and became even more zealous in Amidist practice. He also advised people whom he met to practice Amidism.

In 1929, I was in Sukhavati Temple of Harbin in the Northeast,[35] and invited Grand Master Ti Hsien to transmit the precepts. One day, one of the Bhiksus in the outer court of the temple came to tell me that a Master Hsiu Wu had arrived from Yingkow and was prepared to practice austerity during the period of precept transmission. Later, he was ushered in to see me. I asked him what he was able to do.

"I am willing to look after the sick," he declared.

Master Ting Hsi, then the head of the Sukhavati Temple, assigned a room to him in the outer court of the temple where he stayed for more than ten days. He came again to tell me that he had decided to go away.

Master Ting Hsi, who was present at that time, asked him, "You have made up your mind to look after the sick. Now you want to go away after only ten or so days. Isn't this very inconsistent?"

Master Hsiu Wu replied, "I am not leaving for any place other than rebirth in the Pure Land.

35. The Northeast is the popular name for "Manchuria." Officially, it is known as the Three Eastern Provinces.

Will you, Master, have mercy and order some firewood for my cremation after my death?"[36]

"When will you depart?" asked Master Ting Hsi.

"Probably within ten days," Master Hsiu Wu answered and then returned to his room.

He came again to see me and Master Ting Hsi, and said, "May I ask leave from you, Masters. I am going today. Please let me have a room all to myself, and also ask some people to assist me in invoking Buddha's name to see me off."

Master Ting Hsi ordered that a room in the Cemetery Building be cleaned and that a bunk be constructed of a few planks. He then went to the outer court and asked some Bhiksus to see Master Hsiu Wu off by assisting him in reciting Buddha's name.

When he was about to depart, the people who were bidding him farewell said, "Master Hsiu Wu, today you are going to Buddha's Land. Won't you compose some verses or gathas as a remembrance for us?"

Master Hsiu Wu replied, "I was originally an unskilled laborer, far from being bright, and I

36. In some accounts of Amidist practice, devout followers of the Pure Land are shown to have succeeded in purifying their minds to such an extent that they know in advance the time of their deaths.

cannot write verses or gathas. I have only a few words gathered from my experience to offer you: To be able to speak but be unable to act is not genuine ability."

All who heard him knew that he was treading on solid ground. Then they recited Buddha's name in unison. Master Hsiu Wu joined them, sitting cross-legged, facing the west. He departed after fifteen minutes.

The temple had a tall casket constructed to enable the body to take a sitting position. Toward evening, though the weather was hot, he looked extraordinarily elegant and utterly fresh to that not even a single housefly was attracted to him. Grand Master Ti Hsien and others all rushed to see him and exclaimed that it indeed surprised them. Then the casket was set aflame atop the firewood. Red flames and whitish smoke rose, perfuming the air with a lovely aroma.

This event was afterwards related to Mr. Tui-Fu Pan, a senior Buddhist devotee, who wrote an article giving the account of Master Hsiu Wu's life and his practice of Amidism. This article was printed and widely distributed, for he considered Master Hsiu Wu to be an excellent example among all the Bhiksus.

Secondly, there was Mr. Hsi-Ping Cheng, a

native of Chi-Mo in Shantung. He was a business man. After reading the sutras, he learned that it was good to recite Buddha's name and resolved to practice Amidism and observed celibacy all his life.

In 1933, in Tsintao, after I told him about the advantages of taking the Three Refuges and practicing Amidism, he became much more devoted in his practice. He handed over the family business to his younger brother and then attended to the practice of Amidism with undivided attention. Later, he learned and was able to explain the **Amitabha Sutra.** Every year, he invariably went from Chi-Mo to Tsintao, where he stayed for one or two days, and then proceeded to Pingtu district, where he gave a few lectures on the sutra to his Buddhist friends.

In 1935, Mr. Cheng invited me to preach in Pingtu.

In the spring of 1939, Mr. Cheng went to Pingtu, via Tsintao, to lecture on the sutra.

After two weeks, someone came from Pingtu and told me, "Don't you know, Master, that Mr. Hsi-Ping Cheng is gone?"

I was stunned by this news, and said: "Some ten days ago he was quite well when he passed by here. How could it be that now he is gone so suddenly? What ailed him? How did he pass away?"

When Mr. Cheng had finished his lecture on

the **Amitabha Sutra**, I was told, most of his audience left. Only five or six who had made arrangement for the lectures stayed on for lunch, as they were good friends. After lunch, Mr. Cheng asked one of his friends to have one room rented for him because he was going away.

His friend asked him, "If you are going away, why do you need a room?"

"I am going to be reborn in the Pure Land," Mr. Cheng replied, "People, however, may not like the idea that I might die in their house."

His friend said, "We have been good friends for many years, so that even if you were not to be reborn in the Pure Land and even if you were to succumb to illness, you would be welcome to pass away in my home. Why bother to find a room somewhere else? Now, we have here many who believe in Buddhism and practice Amidism. If you are sure of your rebirth in the Pure Land, you should let the Amidists here witness your example."

Having said these words, his friend had two rooms in his house vacated and a bunk prepared. Mr. Cheng bid a brief farewell to his friends, gaving himself a good shake, and sat on the bunk, cross-legged, facing the west.

Then he said, "I beg your leave for I am going now. Since we have gathered in the faith of Buddha,

I ask, most humbly, that you please invoke Buddha's name in seeing me off."

A friend said: "Won't you give us a gatha as a token of remembrance?"

Mr. Cheng replied: "It is not necessary to give any gatha. You see how I may go without ado like this. You may remember me by following my example."

After hearing these words, they all recited Buddha's name in bidding him goodbye. Mr. Cheng passed away smiling, in less than fifteen minutes. Hence almost all the people in Pingtu knew that it was good to practice Amidism. Many, many people were thus led to believe in Buddhism.

Mr. Cheng's younger brother had been disappointed in his elder brother, who had given up the family and handed over their business to him in order to concentrate on the practice of Amidism. Later, after repeated persuasion by this elder brother, the younger one also came to believe in Buddha's teaching and practiced Amidism, though rather reluctantly and not in earnest. However, now he had witnessed his elder brother's rebirth in the Pure Land while reciting Buddha's name, clearly knowing in advance the hour of his departure, and going with dignity and without fuss. He then realized the absolute truth of Amidism. Afterwards,

he did nothing but practice Amidism. Three years later, he, too, knew in advance the hour of his departure and passed away to be reborn in the Pure Land, though he suffered some illness, and his passing was not as trouble-free as his brother's had been.

The third example[37] is that of Mrs. Chang, a devotee of Tsintao. She had two children, a boy and girl. The family lived in poor circumstances. Her husband was a rickshaw-puller, serving the area around the wharves of the port. They lived near the Chan Shan House, where the Society for the Study of Buddhism was founded. Arrangements were made for me to visit the society and preach there every Sunday. After my sermon, the devotees held a session for Amidist practice. Mrs. Chang took this opportunity to take refuge in the Precious Three and heard the Dharma. She was very devout, practicing Amidism at home on weekdays, and she brought her children to the society on Sundays to listen to the sermons and to join the congregation in reciting Buddha's name.

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37. To help the reader understand the next story, it should be made clear that rebirth in the Pure Land is of ultimate importance to the Amidists. In the Amidist view, it may be said that if one has gained foreknowledge of his rebirth in the Pure Land, his karmic debts have been paid — Editor's Note.

One winter day in 1937, Mrs. Chang arose in the morning and told her husband, "Please take good care of the children, for I am going away today to Buddha's Land."

Her husband, who was busy every day earning a living and ignorant of Buddhism, angrily said, "Oh, stop it. Isn't it enough that we are so poor? Now you find it fit to put on such a play!"

After saying this, he paid her no further attention and went off to work.

Mrs. Chang turned to her children and said, "Today I am going to the Western Paradise. You two must be good and listen to your father. Don't be naughty."

The children, both very young, one ten and the other five, did not understand what their mother had said. They continued playing.

Mrs. Chang then did some household chores. After washing and combing her hair, she put on her simple dress, old but freshly laundered, as she had no new or fancy dress. She sat on the bed, with legs crossed, facing the west, and passed away while invoking Buddha's name.

Later, her two children came inside expecting to eat, only to find their mother motionless, sitting on the bed. Their food was not prepared. She did not reply when they called. She did not budge

when they pushed her. Then they realized that something serious had happened to her. The children wept and told the neighbors, who rushed in to see that Mrs. Chang, though apparently having been dead, for some time, still looked alive. They admired her achievement in the Amidist practice.

Later, Mrs. Chang's husband came home from the wharves. He wept grievously. As he was so poor and had no money for the funeral, members of the society raised the funds to take care of the necessary arrangements.

In conclusion, let us realize that the most important thing in our life is to practice Amidism in order to put an end to samsara, the cycles of birth and death. In all circumstances we must make adjustments to our surroundings so that we may find time, even in our busy schedules, to practice sitting in silent meditation and practice Amidism for some time every day. While working, we can also practice Amidism silently in our minds. Otherwise, indulging all day in cruelty, stealing, lying, carnality, and evil thoughts will involve us in wrongdoing, and creates evil karma which will surely lead us to the three evil paths.

Buddha said in the **Surangama Sutra**, "You owe me **one** life, and I repay you the debt. From such a cause and its associated effects, we continue in

Samsara through hundreds and thousands of eons. You cherish my heart, and I admire your beauty. On account of this cause and its associated factors, we are always in entanglements and bondage through hundreds and thousands of eons. Only the three evils—killing, stealing, and carnality—are basic evils. Because of their causes and related factors, karmic consequences succeed each other."

Just think for a moment how miserable it is to commit the evils of cruelty, stealing, and carnality. I sincerely advise you to hasten to start Amidist practice and to practice as much as you can. As the saying states, "One ejaculation of Buddha's name may bring unlimited merits. One bow to Buddha may eradicate as many sins as the sand grains in the Ganges River."[38]

I have tried to tell you, generally and in a rather fragmentary way, of the benefits to be gained by Amidist practice. For a detailed and complete treatment, there are the five sutras of the Pure Land and the **Ten Essentials of Pure Land** for further study. I have only given you a brief introduction in order to inspire your faith. It is

38. This apparently rather exaggerated statement should be taken only as encouragement towards the continued physical practice of Buddhism, not literally nor as mathematically exact (Editor's Note).

my hope that all of us, now being aware of the advantages of Amidist practice, will be strengthened in our faith and put the six sense faculties under control and maintain pure thoughts, so that we may tread on solid ground and practice Amidism in all earnest, and so that we may all finally reassemble in the Western Paradise.

ORIGINAL VERSION IN CHINESE

Respectfully recorded by Ta Kuang on the first day of the first lunar month, 1950, in the South China Buddhist Academy, Hong Kong.

TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH

Piously sponsored by a group of the Grandmaster's disciples, including Dharma-masters and devoutees, who wish to commemmorate the Centennial of the Grandmaster's birth by introducing this gem of his teachings to the western world, on the first day of the sixth month 1973 (lunar calendar), in the Temple of Enlightenment, Bronx, New York.

I vow that when my life approaches its end,
All obstructions will be swept away;
I will see Amitabha Buddha,
And be born in his Land of Ultimate Bliss.

When reborn in the Western Land,
I will perfect and completely fulfill
Without exception these Great Vows,
To delight and benefit all beings.

The Vows of Samantabhadra
Avatamsaka Sutra

The Teachings Of Great Master Yin Guang

Whether one is a layperson or has left the home-life, one should respect elders and be harmonious to those surrounding him. One should endure what others cannot, and practice what others cannot achieve. One should take others' difficulties unto oneself and help them succeed in their undertakings. While sitting quietly, one should often reflect upon one's own faults, and when chatting with friends, one should not discuss the rights and wrongs of others. In every action one makes, whether dressing or eating, from dawn to dusk and dusk 'till dawn, one should not cease to recite the

Buddha's name. Aside from Buddha recitation, whether reciting quietly or silently, one should not give rise to other improper thoughts. If wandering thoughts appear, one should immediately dismiss them. Constantly maintain a humble and repentful heart; even if one has upheld true cultivation, one should still feel one's practice is shallow and never boast. One should mind one's own business and not the business of others. Only look after the good examples of others instead of bad ones. One should see oneself as mundane and everyone else as Bodhisattvas. If one can cultivate according to these teachings, one is sure to reach the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Homage to Amitabha! Amitabha!

"Wherever the Buddha's teachings have been received, either in cities or countrysides, people would gain inconceivable benefits. The land and people would be enveloped in peace. The sun and moon will shine clear and bright. Wind and rain would appear accordingly, and there will be no disasters. Nations would be prosperous and there would be no use for soldiers or weapons. People would abide by morality and accord with laws. They would be courteous and humble, and everyone would be content without injustices. There would be no thefts or violence. The strong would not dominate the weak and everyone would be settled at their proper place in society."

☸ *The Sutra of Amitabha's Purity, Equality, and Understanding*

With bad advisors forever left behind,
From paths of evil he departs for eternity,
Soon to see the Buddha of Limitless Light
And perfect Samantabhadra's Supreme Vows.

The supreme and endless blessings
of Samantabhadra's deeds,
I now universally transfer.
May every living being, drowning and adrift,
Soon return to the Land of
Limitless Light!

The Vows of Samantabhadra

I vow that when my life approaches its end,
All obstructions will be swept away;
I will see Amitabha Buddha,
And be born in his Land of Ultimate Bliss and Peace.

When reborn in the Western Land,
I will perfect and completely fulfill
Without exception these Great Vows,
To delight and benefit all beings.

The Vows of Samantabhadra
Avatamsaka Sutra

DEDICATION OF MERIT

May the merit and virtues
accrued from this work,
Adorn the Buddha's Pure Land,
Repaying the four kinds
of kindness above,
and relieving the sufferings of
those in the Three Paths below.

May those who see and hear of this,
All bring forth the heart of
Understanding,
And live the Teachings for
the rest of this life,
Then be born together in
The Land of Ultimate Bliss.
Homage to Amitabha Buddha!

NAMO AMITABHA

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HOMAGE TO AMITABHA BUDDHA

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